LAND BASED ECOTOURISM
WINTER ACTIVITIES (BACKCOUNTRY SKIING, SNOWSHOEING, DOGSLEDDING)

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BUILDING BLOCKS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ANALYSIS

PREFACE

PURPOSE

Building Blocks have been conceived and developed by the Economic Development Branch of the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, under the guidance of Nancy South, Manager Economic Analysis, as an analytical tool that supports British Columbia coastal and land and resource use planning and decision-making and economic development initiatives. The Blocks contain concise business and sector information for a broad range of resource-based business types in BC. At this point, there are more than 30 Blocks either complete or in draft form. Several more Blocks have been identified as high priority by planning tables and other client groups. Additional Building Blocks will be developed over time, and some Blocks may be updated. For the most current Building Blocks, please see the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management website, at: http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/rmd/ecdev/

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BENEFITS

Building Blocks are expected to provide the following general benefits:

- Increase efficiency and more informed decision-making by providing readily accessible, credible information to planning and economic development processes;
- Improve the consistency of economic information across planning areas;
- Support economic analysis and decision-making that occurs outside formal coastal and land use planning processes; and
- Provide linkages between economic analysis and other social and environmental analytical tools (through identifying resource requirements to support economic activities and general compatibilities with other sectors and values).

LIMITATIONS

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in Building Blocks is accurate and consistent. Approved, credible data sources are the foundation for Building Blocks. All Blocks were reviewed by sponsoring agencies and other experts. However, users are cautioned that information is used at their own risk, and that the authors and sponsors are not liable for any damages. Any conclusions or interpretations by the authors are not intended to represent government policy. Also, note that Building Blocks do not provide site specific information nor do they consider requirements for sustainability (social, community, environmental).

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RECOMMENDED REFERENCE/CITATION

BC Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management, 2003, Building Blocks for Economic Development and Analysis, *[Title of Sector]*. http://srmwww.gov.bc.ca/rmd/ecdev/

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nature-based tourism / Ecotourism is defined as travel to relatively undisturbed areas with the specific objective of admiring, studying and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as existing cultural features found in the area.

Ecotourism activities have been sorted into the following categories:

- **Marine Ecotourism**
  - marine cruising including sailing, yacht and power cruising
  - sea kayaking tours

- **Land based Ecotourism**
  - Bicycle Touring/Mountain Biking
  - Hiking/Backpacking/Trekking
  - Horseback Trail Riding
  - Freshwater River Rafting, Canoeing and Kayaking
  - Winter Tourism (Back Country /Tour Skiing, Dog Sledding, Snow Shoeing)

Please refer to the **Marine Ecotourism Overview** and the **Land-based Ecotourism Overview** documents for background information on the Building Blocks, a definition of Ecotourism, the overview of the Ecotourism sector and the bibliography. The Ecotourism Overviews are an integral component of the suit of Ecotourism Building Blocks.

2.0 OVERVIEW

- Winter ecotourism products include non motorized winter activities that emphasize a nature-based or backcountry experience. This Building Block includes commercial operators and guides who offer multi-day ski touring, snowshoeing and dogsledding packages as their primary activity of business during the winter season; it excludes recreationists who take part in these activities on their own; it also excludes heli-skiing, cat skiing, downhill skiing, and snowmobiling.
- On multi-day trips, participants usually stay in tents, snow caves or backcountry cabins/huts; most commercial operators offer lodge or cabin/hut accommodation (guests may stay at a base camp or in multiple huts/cabins during a multi-day tour). Lodge facilities are not included as part of this analysis, however, given that basic accommodation (i.e., huts/cabins or heated tents) are provided for most backcountry multi-day touring activities, these have been included as part of the analysis.
- Winter ecotourism activities are important for many ecotourism operators in that they provide an opportunity to utilize facilities, equipment and staff in the off season.
- Ski touring, snowshoeing and dogsledding generally take place in the backcountry and in many cases require helicopter/snow cat transport to access a base camp or lodge facility. Ski touring involves the breaking of new trails and is suited to advanced, physically fit skiers. Snowshoeing expeditions do not require the same degree of technical skill as backcountry skiing but do require an intermediate level of physical fitness. Dogsledding

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expeditions – where a team of dogs is harnessed to a sled or toboggan designed to carry passengers and supplies – range from family oriented trips to extreme adventures to remote locations.

- Operations range in size from individual operators who specialize in a particular winter product to full service lodges that provide a range of ecotourism activities and packages on a year round basis.
- Operators offer trips ranging on average from 2 days to 10 days with package prices ranging from $150 to $230 per day per person for ski touring and snowshoeing and between $170 and $340 per day for dogsledding (including, guides, safety gear, accommodation and meals) with some prices including a combination of lodge and hut/camping accommodation.

3.0 LAND RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS/SENSITIVITIES

- Ecotourism winter activities require remote backcountry areas with reliable snow conditions, a variety of terrain from open bowls to gladed slopes, and safe and accessible terrain in inclement weather (snow depth and terrain variety is most critical for backcountry ski touring). A premium is placed on pristine wilderness experience and a lack of motorized vehicles.
- Resource features that support winter ecotourism activities include attractive scenery, remote unroaded areas and opportunities for wildlife viewing (e.g., caribou, mountain goat and sheep) and ice fishing.
- Most of the BC's Interior and Coastal mountain ranges are suited to winter ecotourism activities although the most popular areas are the Rocky, Columbia, and Cariboo mountain ranges and the Coast Mountains in the vicinity of Whistler.
- There is a potential for conflict between winter ecotourists and other backcountry users. (e.g., snowmobiles and helicopter/snow cat skiing). Winter ecotourists are sensitive to congestion and typically seek a pristine wilderness environment. Modifications to the landscape from forestry and other industrial activities may affect the quality of winter tourism activities, although activities such as ski touring often occur in alpine and sub-alpine settings where forestry activities are unlikely to occur.
- Winter ecotourism activities do not typically require as large a land base (e.g., approximately 20 square kilometres for ski touring) as other winter activities such as heli-skiing and snowmobiling.
- Winter ecotourism activities could have environmental impacts from human waste and wildlife disturbance (caribou, mountain goat and sheep, and wolverine)
- Land and resource management issues that may affect winter ecotourism activities include:
  - maintenance of wilderness and undisturbed natural settings
  - protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat
  - access to backcountry and suitable lodge, hut and camping sites
  - appropriate management strategies to address impacts from competing resource use
  - lack of clarity regarding future tenuring of Crown land for commercial recreation
  - unresolved First Nation rights and title issues.

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4.0 INVESTMENT REQUIREMENTS

- Capital costs for a multi-day ski touring or snowshoeing operation capable of handling up to 8 guests are approximately $10,000 to $15,000 (includes camping gear and equipment such as avalanche safety/rescue equipment, survival gear and snowshoes for snowshoeing operators; does not include accommodation infrastructure).
- Some operators will require a vehicle for transporting guests (approximately $35,000) and/or a snow mobile for trail and hut maintenance, and rescue (approximately $10,000).
- The cost of a basic hut is between $20,000 and $40,000 depending on the size, construction materials and location.
- Dogsledding operators have similar costs to back country ski and snow shoe operators plus the additional costs of dogs and sleds. Sleds, animals and related equipment for three dog teams (capacity for 8 guests) would be approximately $22,000 (assuming 8 dogs per team and 4 teams).
- Major operating costs include insurance, labour (guides), and supplies such as food. In addition, operations require marketing and other administration start-up costs such as legal fees, licenses, permits, etc.
- Winter ecotourism operations are often set up conjunction with a lodge, which would require a much higher investment.
- A 1988 study of adventure travel in BC indicated that mountaineering/backpacking operators had an average investment of $56,000.[1]
- Revenue potential for winter ecotourism businesses is limited by group size constraints, seasonal weather, snow conditions, and visitation patterns. To offset these limitations, many operators expand trail and facilities use to include trail based non-winter activities such as horse back trail riding, mountain biking and hiking.[2]
- Business growth constraints include difficulties in gaining adequate market share, developing a reputation and creating a market niche (product/location).

5.0 INFRASTRUCTURE

- Marked or mapped touring route sufficient to support multi-day ski touring, snowshoeing or dogsledding.
- Base camp facility and satellite huts/camping sites.
- Access to backcountry touring areas.

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6.0 MARKET

- Winter ecotourism trips range from 2 to 10 days with the average length of a package being about 4 to 6 days. Most operators offer custom trips tailored to meet the needs of a group of guests. Winter ecotourism occurs from the beginning of December to the end of March, subject to snow conditions.
- Package prices range from $150 to $230 per day per person for ski touring and snowshoeing and $170 to $340 per day for dogsledding (including guides, safety gear, accommodation and meals) with some prices including a combination of lodge and hut/camping accommodation.
- Winter ecotourism is a niche market and is not expected to expand rapidly in the short to medium term. Snowshoeing and dogsledding are specialized niche products. Ski touring appeals to a wider market, however a large proportion of ski-tourers are self-guided and utilize huts and cabins operated by local alpine clubs and other outdoor organizations. The Canadian Rockies and to a lesser extent the Columbia Mountains have an international reputation for ski touring, which gives ski touring operators in these regions a marketing advantage over those in other areas of the province.[3]
- Ski tourers tend to be highly skilled, physically fit, environmentally aware, self-dependent and knowledgeable about avalanche safety and rescue techniques. As skiing technology improves (i.e. skis make it easier for beginners to ski in unpacked snow), ski touring may become more accessible to a broader market.[4] Snowshoeing and dogsledding appeal to a broader market base and are more suitable as family-based activities.
- Statistics for Nordic skiing indicate that 8 percent of Canadians over the age of 12 (approximately 2 million people) cross country ski. The sector grew at an average rate of 4 percent between 1984/85 and 1993/94. In the US, participation in cross country skiing and ski touring grew by 22.5 percent to a total of 6.5 million adults during the same period. Of this total, approximately 3.7 million participate in ski touring.[5]
- A survey of ecotourism consumers in key North American markets rated cross country skiing as the least important among a list of nature/adventure activities in British Columbia. Cross country skiing was the only winter activity on the list, which suggests that consumers do not typically regard ecotourism as a winter-based activity.[6]
- Dogsledding attracts a wide demographic range from children to seniors, with greater popularity among females (60 percent) than males. The highest participation is among those 20 to 34 years (39 percent), 35 to 44 years (26 percent) 45 to 54 years (20 percent).[7]
- BC's main competitors for winter ecotourism are Alberta, Alaska and Quebec. BC is ideally suited in terms offering a wide range of skiing/snowshoeing/dogsledding terrain with well suited snow conditions.

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7.0 LABOUR MARKET

- Operators require guides with avalanche and winter survival skills, first aid, technical skills (skiing, snowshoeing, dogsledding), snow camping, trail development, leadership and group management skills, ability to interact well with people, ability to convey knowledge in an interesting and informative way. For dogsledding operations, guides also need experience in handling dog teams.
- A typical multi-day trip will require one to two guides depending on the number of guests and the type of trip being offered.
- Wage rates for a guide range between $125 and $250 per day, with the upper range being for a certified ski touring guide. Guides typically receive food and lodging, which makes wage comparisons with other industries more difficult. Also, many operations are owner-operated and employ family labour.
- Owner/operators typically play an active role in the operation of the business including marketing, business management, administration, etc.

8.0 CAPACITY

- The major constraints to growth are market related rather than resource related.
- Operators prefer backcountry terrain that is not heavily used by other recreation users.
- Most areas of British Columbia have the capacity to develop and expand winter ecotourism activities.

9.0 REGULATORY REGIME

9.1 Safety and Licensing

- There are no requirements in B.C. for outfitters to hire certified guides; however, most operators do hire guides with certification (e.g., Association of Canadian Mountain Guides) or with considerable backcountry and winter touring experience including knowledge of avalanche safety and rescue techniques.

9.2 Use of Provincial Parks

- Tourism operators using Provincial Parks require Park Use Permits (PUP).

9.3 Use of Crown Lands

- In 1998, the B.C. government introduced a commercial recreation management program requiring operators to acquire licenses for extensive use of Crown lands.
- The 1998 regulations require outdoor operators to apply for a Licence of Occupation for each area of Crown land they plan to use for more than 14 days in a six month period. Annual fees for a base camp are $500, plus $100 per site for satellite sites (excluding an

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application fee of $107 per operator). This grants holders the right to occupy a site over any other commercial users, but recreational users continue to have over-riding priority on any site, licensed or not.[8] In some cases, tenure holders may be allowed to build improvements on specific sites, and they may be granted exclusive rights to those improvements.[9]

- The 1998 regulations for the use of crown land sets permitting fees for non-motorized commercial use at $1.00 per client day, with a minimum of $500 per year. The B.C. Government is working with industry to implement the B.C. Commercial Recreation Policy and to encourage operators offering fee-for-service activities on crown land to register tenures.
- The 1998 regulations specify that the issuing of a license requires the completion of a long term management plan and a minimum of $1 million in third party liability insurance.

10.0 GOVERNMENT REVENUES

- Government revenues are generated through corporate and personal income taxes.
- Operators pay permitting fees for operating in national and provincial parks and for the extensive use of areas on crown lands.

11.0 INPUT-OUTPUT TABLE – WINTER ECOTOURISM ACTIVITIES

Indicator	1986 Average	Current indictors for a Operation serving up to 8 guests
Number of Operations	55 ski operators Includes cross country and ski touring)	Ski touring: estimate 60 - 70 operators Dogsledding: estimate 5 -10 operators Snowshoeing: estimate 15 - 20 operators
Land Resource Requirements	Trail network, hut/camping sites and access to backcountry alpine, subalpine areas with suitable terrain and snow pack	Trail network, hut/camping sites and access to backcountry alpine, subalpine areas with suitable terrain and snow pack
Crown Resources Accessed/Used	Trail network, hut/camping sites and backcountry alpine, subalpine areas	Trail network, hut/camping sites and backcountry alpine, subalpine areas
Product Created	Cross country ski touring (likely includes single day tours)	Multi-day ski touring, dogsledding and snowshoeing packages

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Indicator	1986 Average	Current indictors for a Operation serving up to 8 guests	
Investment	$56,500 per operator	Ski touring/snowshoeing Equipment $15,000 Cabin/huts 50,000 Snow mobile 10,000 Vehicle 35,000 Total: $110,000	Dogsledding (incremental) Dogs $16,000 Sleds/gear 6,000 Total: $22,000
Sales	$71,000 (Likely includes revenue for lodging in addition to multi-day pack trips)	$124,000 (Assumes 650 client days @ $190 per day)	$130,000 (Assumes 550 client days @ $235 per day)
Employment	3.4 Person Years (PY) of employment per operator (likely includes employees in accommodation facility) $25,500 in wages per operator or $7,600 per PY	Approximately $32,000 in wages per operator (Assumes an average of 2 employees per trip at an average wage of $160 per day for 100 days) Owner-operator often works part of the year to plan and market business.	
Purchases of goods and services	$34,500	Approximately $19,500 in food and supplies ($30 per client day)	Approximately $16,500 in food and supplies plus $15,000 to feed 32 dogs
Government Revenues		$1,000 to 5,000 per year depending on number of guests and number of trail systems and sites used.	

Source: 1986 data: The Outdoor Recreation Council of B.C., *Adventure Travel in British Columbia, Summary*, March 1988.

Current indicators: prepared by *Stuart Gale & Associates Ltd.* based on interviews with operators and other documents.

11.1 Preliminary Income Statement – Winter Ecotourism Activities

	Ski Touring/Snowshoeing (assumes 8 guests per trip)	Dogsledding (assumes 8 guests per trip)
Revenues	$114,000 600 client days @ $190 per day	$130,000 550 client days @ $235 per day
Wages (incl. WCB, UIC, etc.)	$32,000 (2 employees earning an average of $160 per day for 100 days)	$32,000 (2 employees earning an average of $160 per day for 100 days)
Marketing, Promotion and Travel	$4,000	$4,000
Food and supplies	$19,500 (Based on an average of $30.00 per client day)	$31,500 (Includes $16,500 for food and $15,000 for dog food)

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	Ski Touring/Snowshoeing (assumes 8 guests per trip)	Dogsledding (assumes 8 guests per trip)
Maintenance	$4,000	$6,000 (Includes vet and dog care costs)
Transportation (vehicle and gas)	$4,500	$4,500
Insurance	$ 2,500	$ 2,500
Government fees/permits	$3,000	$3,000
Sub-total Variable Costs	$69,500	$83,500
Contribution towards Fixed Costs, Debt Interest and Owner	$44,500 39.0% of revenues	$46,500 35.8% of revenues

Notes:
Revenue for ski touring/snow shoeing assumes a capacity of 8 guests operating over a 120 day season with an average occupancy of 62.5 percent. Revenue for dogsledding assumes a similar capacity and operating season with an average occupancy of 57.5 percent.

Source: Current indicators: prepared by *Stuart Gale & Associates* based on a review of operator websites and interviews with commercial operators.

The main data sources for this building block include:

- Interviews with operators and industry representatives.
- Internet web sites of various commercial operators.
- The ARA Consulting Group, *Williams Lake Forest District Tourism Opportunities Study*, April 2001.
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- Clover Point Cartographics, Geoscape Environmental Planners and Lions Gate Consulting Inc., *Forest Tourism Opportunity Study for the Squamish Forest District and In-Shuck-Ch/N'Quat'qua Statement of Interest Area,* March 2002.
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➤ The Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia, *Adventure Travel in British Columbia*, 1988.

LIST OF ENDNOTES

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[1] The Outdoor Recreation Council of British Columbia, 1988, *Adventure Travel in British Columbia*, (p. 8).

[2] (p. 125).

[3] Future Legacy Consulting Group, 2001, Tourism Opportunities Study for the Columbia Forest District (section 5.3.2.2)

[4] Ibid (section 5.3.2.2)

[5] The ARA Consulting Group, 2001, Williams Lake Forest District Tourism Opportunity Study (p. 123).

[6] The ARA Consulting Group and HLA Consultants, Ecotourism – Nature/Adventure/ Culture: Alberta and British Columbia Market Demand Assessment, Consumer Telephone Survey (p. 4-19).

[7] The ARA Consulting Group, 2001, Williams Lake Forest District Tourism Opportunity Study (p. 124).

[8] B.C. Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, wlapwww.gov.bc.ca, 2002; also, Land and Water British Columbia, www.lwbc.bc.ca/for business/commercial recreation, 2002.

[9] Outdoor Recreation Council of B.C., *Examining a Trail Strategy for B.C. from the Demand Perspective*, 2000.

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